

NORTHFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the meeting on April 13, 2016

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 pm.

I. ROLL CALL: Present were Commissioners Pam Knox, Nathaniel Miller, Leslie Matthews (for part of the meeting), Christine Barnes, Jane Pekol, Ruth Ruttenberg, and Laura Hill-Eubanks. Also attending were Michael Lew-Smith and Aaron C. Worthley from Arrowwood Environmental; Nathan Ranker and Laura Ranker; and Collin O'Neill, manager of the Norwich University Shaw Recreation Center.

II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA:

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (scheduled):

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: March 16, 2016 minutes approved 6-0-0.

V. DISCUSSION

a. Town Forest Stewardship Plan: Consulting ecologists from Arrowwood Environmental provided an update on the Northfield Town Forest natural resources inventory that they have been working on. The results will be used to inform the draft town forest plan. A map they produced was reviewed. An interactive map of the town forest will be forwarded to the NCC for their input. NCC would especially like Russ and Leslie to provide their comments on the map.

Discussion with consultants, their recommendations, and NCC observations included the following:

- Which trails are suitable for use, and which are not, due to water/wetness and other reasons (too steep for some uses; wetland areas). Paine Mountain Trail is currently the primary trail available for use. The trail around the beaver pond/wetland area should be closed.
- Timber management for early successional habitat in some areas of the forest would benefit some wildlife; could be an educational tool for forestry demonstration projects
- Consider mowing Cheney Field on a schedule to benefit grassland bird habitat; this would be late summer mowing and 15-year rotation; to prevent invasive species, do not disturb the soil
- Cut in patches to allow for growth in sections that are not cut each rotation; every 7 years for example.
- Protect Hawk Watch area – thin for opening up the view and remove invasive plants. Area needs protection for endangered plant species. Some damage has occurred to the grounds up there due to wheeled vehicles.
- There has been “rogue” (unapproved) trail cutting/bushwhacking from the

top of the Paine Mountain Trail and the Hawk Watch area down into the Norwich parcel.

- One ski trail is being used. If use is continued there should be a plan for vegetation management.
- Surface waters (streams, wetlands) should be protected from disturbance (such as logging/mowing) for 100-200 feet from the edges. Vernal pools should be protected 750 feet from the edges.
- Any camping if allowed:
 - Should follow Primitive Camping guidelines
 - Camping should not be within 200 feet of surface waters (streams/wetlands); and should be away from important wildlife habitat.
 - Camping should be scattered and not concentrated in one area.
 - Should not use the same areas over and over again.
 - Others forests that allow camping do so by permit only, with rules that restrict number of campers and days
 - There are no bathroom facilities in our Town Forest
 - There have been problems with trash left behind in the Town Forest

Collin O'Neill from Norwich U. Shaw Center offered the following comments:

- Norwich has plans to open up more ski trails
- There has been "rogue" trail cutting for bikes on the Norwich side
- Collin supports/proposes:
 - Linking Norwich U. bike trails to the Northfield Town Forest trails; in particular near the top of the Paine Mountain Trail.
 - Opening up all the trails in the Town Forest to biking
 - Potentially cutting more trails in the Town Forest

Some NCC members had concerns about several of these points.

The natural resources survey, its incorporation into the forest management plan, and trail use will be taken up further at later meetings.

b. Forest signage – Nate Ranker: Nathan presented his ideas for signage and a map for the Town Forest. Materials will include educational signs with information about wildlife/fauna; trail markers; and a map of the Paine Mountain Trail. The materials would link to a website with more information. The ideas were well received. Nathan will follow up with the NCC at a future meeting.

c. Norwich Boy Scout Camporee request – Collin: tabled

d. 4/12 Select Board meeting: Pam, Christine, Jane, and Laura attended. The Select Board voted unanimously to approve the green infrastructure stormwater catch basin behind the village on the Dog River.

NCC will not apply for tree planning grant due to deadlines and other problems

with timing and planning.

At the 4/12 meeting, a resolution was passed by the Select Board to provide funding to the Conservation Commission for its needs. It currently has no budget and relies on grant money for its projects and activities. The funding would amount to ½ of the revenue received through town forest activities such as timber sales and the recent sugar maple tree taps. Former Zoning Administrator Michele Braun pointed out at the Select Board meeting that traditionally revenue generated by town forests was provided to Conservation Commissions to aid in management of the town forest.

NCC would welcome the revenue from town forest/timber sales. Some NCC members have concerns over the funds specific to the tree taps. Further NCC discussion was tabled.

e. Trail Grant: NCC has been awarded a grant to build footbridges over streams in the Town Forest. VYCC will be asked to assist with the construction.

f. Rotary Grant – Conservation Camp – scholarship: NCC was awarded funds from the Rotary to send a Northfield child to conservation camp. Pam attended the award event. NCC will be seeking applications from kids interested in attending conservation camp.

g. Solar Projects: Jane informed the group that SunCommon will be at Cornerstone Burger Co. to present information to the public on solar projects. Event is on May 4 at 4 PM. Catamount Solar is also gathering information on community solar projects for Northfield.

h. Teen Center group collaboration: The Teen Center group is interested in having a Town Forest day in May. Discussion tabled.

i. Water Flume public night: A volunteer is needed to oversee the public demonstration of the Water Flume that is planned for April 26 at 6-7 PM. Many of the members of the NCC will be unavailable that night.

f. NCC Officer Elections – Chair, Vice – Chair, Secretary, Treasurer: tabled

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

VII. ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Laura Hill-Eubanks, Northfield Conservation Commission.

These minutes are subject to changes and approval at the next regular meeting, but are substantially correct.